

Michael F. Easley
Governor



State of North Carolina Office of the Governor

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GOV. EASLEY SIGNS COASTAL RECREATIONAL FISHING LICENSE INTO LAW ***House Bill 831 To Generate \$15 Million Annually For Research, Habitat Enhancement***

RALEIGH – Gov. Mike Easley today signed legislation creating a coastal recreational fishing license and the North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Fund, which will generate about \$15.3 million annually to conserve and restore North Carolina's marine resources and fisheries habitats.

"Our coastal fishing industry contributes more than \$1 billion annually to North Carolina's economy," Easley said. "The critical legislation will help provide vitally important resources to support our on-going efforts to see that our fisheries are thriving and vibrant for generations to come."

House Bill 831 establishes a \$15 annual license beginning Jan. 1, 2006 allowing recreational fishermen to harvest seafood for personal consumption. Licenses are required for those aged 18 or older, regardless of state residency, who fish in coastal waters – including sounds, coastal rivers and their tributaries – out to three miles in the ocean. A 7-day license, which can only be purchased once a year, will be available for \$1. Seafood harvested under this license cannot be sold. Fishermen will need to abide by the state's recreational size and possession limits for a number of species ranging from bluefish, flounder and drum to cobia, sharks and billfish.

Proceeds from license sales will go into the N.C. Saltwater Fishing Fund to be administered by an 11-member board of trustees. The board will issue grants for resource and habitat enhancement, research, land acquisition to improve fishery habitat or public access to coastal fishing waters, construction of public beach access and public marinas, emergency dredging to restore access to public fishing areas, marine science scholarships and administrative and operating expenses for the board. State and local agencies, and non-profit organizations whose focus is conservation, preservation or restoration of marine resources, may apply for these grants.

North Carolina, with 2.3 million acres of estuaries, has the largest estuarine system of any single state on the Atlantic coast. The state's coastal fisheries are overwhelmingly estuarine-dependent. Species must use estuaries to complete their life-cycle: spawning, nursery areas, feeding areas and migration routes. Fish from North Carolina estuaries and coastal rivers migrate throughout the Atlantic coast and support significant commercial fisheries along the Atlantic seaboard.

House Bill 831, sponsored by Rep. Pryor Gibson (D-Troy), Rep. Danny McComas (D-Wilmington) and Sen. David Weinstein (D-Lumberton), passed the House by a vote of 66-34 and the Senate by a vote of 45-1.

(Editor's Note: For digital photographs of the bill signing, please contact the Governor's Press Office.)

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